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Koikkalainen, Saara

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Serial migrants and one-time migrants: The transnational lives of highly skilled Finns working in Europe

SAARA KOIKKALAINEN

PhD, post-doctoral researcher

University of Helsinki, Swedish School of Social Sciences

Snellmaninkatu (P.O. Box 16), 00014 University of Helsinki

saara.koikkalainen@helsinki.fi

Abstract

Europe is home to a globally unique area, where it is possible for the majority of Europeans to study, work, or retire in a wide geographical area. Based on two consecutive online surveys and 18 biographical interviews, the article examines the experiences of young, highly educated Finns living abroad in 12 EU countries. The article focuses on two types of migrants: one-time migrants with limited previous international experience and serial migrants with mobility capital accumulated during previous international experiences. The article concludes that this mobility capital is a major factor influencing the likelihood of onward migration. The article also contributes to the understanding of Europe as a transnational area where various forms of mobility coexist as mobile Europeans look for study and career opportunities and suitable lifestyles abroad.

Keywords: Intra-European migration, liquid migration, highly-skilled mobility, mobility capital, European Union

Introduction

The European Union (EU) is a globally unique area, where it is possible for the majority of Europeans to study, work, or retire in any of the current 28 EU member states, as well as Switzerland, Iceland, Norway, and Liechtenstein. Europe is host to various cross-cutting migration regimes and migrant groups that move for different reasons and lengths of time (Recchi 2008; Scholten and Ostaijen 2018). European citizens with the necessary means to migrate, may choose to move to another EU member state either temporarily or permanently to study (e.g. King and Ruiz-Gelices 2003; Murphy-Lejeune 2003; Sigalas 2010; Teichler and Janson 2007), further one's career (Csedő 2008; Ryan and Mulholland 2014), to experiment with living abroad as a young, freemoving professional *Eurostar* (Favell 2008; King et al. 2016), or because of lifestyle reasons (Benson and O'Reilly 2009; Gustafson 2001; O'Reilly 2000). Due to the ease of crossing borders, intra-EU mobility is often said to resemble *internal mobility* rather than *international migration* (e.g. Koikkalainen 2018; Favell 2008; Recchi and Triandafyllidou 2010; Santacreu et al. 2009). The area of free movement in Europe is, therefore, an ideal arena for studying how migrants lead transnational lives in a context where many barriers to cross-state mobility have been removed. The word transnational here refers to living abroad and engaging with two or more countries during the period examined in the article. The focus is on one internationally mobile group: highly skilled Finns living in other EU member states.

The forms of voluntary mobility and migration are diversifying globally and within Europe (e.g. Favell et al. 2011; King 2002; Vertovec 2007), even though the extent to which Europeans lead transnational lives differs (Recchi, Grifone Baglioni and Salamonska 2017). For those willing to experiment with living abroad, the networks catering for students, trainees, low-paid seasonal workers, academics and high-skilled professionals, for example, offer possibilities for mobility lasting from weeks to several years. Official migration statistics are based on the assumption that immigrants enter the destination country for good, or plan to stay at least the period of one year (Fassman et al. 2009; IOM 2014). However, real-life migration trajectories, be they those of highly skilled professionals or less-privileged migrants, are not that simple but may consist of several consecutive migrations with temporary stays along the way. Migration scholars have introduced new terms to describe such forms of mobility that involve several countries, develop via stages and/or include periods of return or onward movement. These include at least *secondary migration* (Takenaka 2007), *serial migration* (Ossman 2004), *twice migration* (Brown 2006), *stepwise migration* (Paul 2011; Paul 2017), *transit migration* (Collyer and de Haas 2012; Collyer, Düvell, and Haas 2012) and *onward migration* (e.g. Ahrens, Kelly and van Liempt 2016; Jeffery and Murison 2011; Kelly 2013; Lindley and Van Hear 2007). The definition of what constitutes serial, transit or onward migration may vary according to how many countries are involved, and whether the migrant's mobility path proceeds stepwise towards the most desired destination or involves circular mobility between several destinations and the

country of origin. Moving several times, in turn, increases one's mobility capital, the "(...) sub-component of human capital, enabling individuals to enhance their skills because of the richness of the international experience gained by living abroad" (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002, 51, see also Brooks and Waters 2010; Findlay et al. 2006).

Nijhoff and Gordano (2016) provide an outline of different migrant typologies that researchers of intra-European migration have introduced to describe the differing migration motivations, intentions of settlement and potential for onward migration. One of the new terms is *liquid migration*, introduced by Godfried Engbersen (2012) drawing on the famous societal analysis of Zygmunt Bauman (2000) on *liquid modernity*. Engbersen and Snel (2013) use migrants from the Central and Eastern European new EU member states as their example of liquid migrants, as their mobility is often temporary, circular and invisible due to non-registration in the country of destination. Engbersen (2012, 99) defines liquid migration as follows: it is temporary labour migration, of predominantly legal migrants, who move multiple times and towards multiple directions. The migrants hold individualized life strategies and their migratory habitus is that of "intentional unpredictability". Engbersen (2018, 68) stresses that the concept does not imply that migrants are free to choose the life and adventures they want, but rather it "(...) implies that keeping your options open is a rational attitude developed by intra-European mobile citizens in response to the institutional uncertainties and opportunities that they encounter." Thus the concept of liquid migration stresses the openness of the migrant's life options, where international mobility is one possible course of action, not a form of goal-oriented movement towards a desired final destination as is the case in transit migration (Collyer and de Haas 2012; Collyer, Düvell, and Haas 2012) or in stepwise migration (Paul 2011; 2017), for example.

This article examines the migration trajectories of one group of intra-European migrants: highly skilled Finns who live abroad within the EU15 area. It draws on the Working in Europe Study (WiE) which collected the experiences of tertiary educated Finns working abroad in different EU member states in two consecutive surveys conducted in 2008 (N=364) and 2010 (N=194). It examined the ways in which the Finns find work abroad, what kinds of skills and qualifications ease or impede labour market access, and how their cultural capital transfers across intra-European borders (Koikkalainen 2013b). The study falls within the research agenda launched by Favell, Feldblum, and Smith (2006) and their effort to "bring a human face to the study of global highly skilled mobility". The article discusses the topic of onward versus return migration via the results of the WiE study: first by observing the migration trajectories of survey respondents, and second by examining two groups at the opposite ends of a spectrum of previous transnational moves and other forms of international experience, here understood to signify mobility capital. Namely, it has been noted that prior international experience increases the probability of migration later in life (e.g. Santacreu et al. 2009, 70) so this article examines how the *serial migrants* who have moved several times differ from the *one-time migrants*, for whom the current move abroad was a unique event in their life. The article takes part in discussions on the nature of migration

in contemporary Europe and provides a view into the negotiated nature of mobility in a context, where the transnationally mobile highly skilled individuals are free to pursue their own life projects in a borderless area of free movement.

Migration trajectories in the Working in Europe study

When Finland joined the European Economic Area (EEA) in 1994 and the EU in 1995, the European free movement regime was already fully in place. The doors to Europe were suddenly wide open, and young Finns began to experiment with living abroad via the newly introduced student exchange programmes (Garam 2003). Visa and passport-free travel within the Scandinavian countries had been possible since the 1950s, but after the EEA/EU membership the area of free movement was much larger. The main destination countries of the increased mobility were among the EU15 countries, which have received 67 percent of all Finnish nationals that moved abroad since 1994. Migration statistics on mobility to the EU15 area also testifies to the importance of the younger age groups in the increase in migrant numbers: those aged between 15 to 34 years account for more than half of all moves abroad made by Finnish citizens during this time. For example, the share of these young migrants has been 76 percent of those who moved to Denmark, 72 of those who moved to Ireland, and more than 60 percent of all those who moved to the UK and the Netherlands. The increased importance of London as one of the main destination cities in Europe is also visible. While in the early 1990s less than 100 Finnish citizens aged 15–34 moved to the UK each year, their numbers have risen steeply so that in the past 15 years on average 626 young Finns have chosen that destination; the highest ever number (735) being reached in 2016, the year of the Brexit vote (Official Statistics of Finland 2018).

The WIE-study on the labour market experiences of highly skilled Finns in EU15 countries consisted of a 2008 online survey (n=364), a 2010 follow-up survey (n=194) and 18 respondent interviews in 2011. The participants were found from various web-sites, online discussion forums, and by snowballing through networks of Finns living abroad in 12 different countries. Because the sample of the original survey was not random but based on participant self-selection, it cannot be generalized to represent all Finns living abroad. Finding interested survey respondents online was easier in some countries than in others, hence 87 percent of all responses were from the United Kingdom, Germany, Belgium, France, and Spain. The participants include, for example, tertiary educated consultants, finance managers, lawyers, health professionals, ICT-workers, post-doctoral scholars, free-lance journalists, and self-employed language specialists. The intended stay abroad of the respondents varied from permanent emigration to short-term mobility with a fixed time limit. Over two thirds (77 percent) of all respondents of the 2008 survey were female. The respondent average age was 32 years and they were fairly recent movers as 78 percent had moved abroad after the year 2000. 45 percent of the respondents were cohabiting, 28 percent were married

and 27 percent were single. Most respondents (76 percent) did not have any children.

The follow-up survey in 2010, sent via an e-mail link to all those who volunteered their e-mail addresses, generated 194 responses, from 148 (76 percent) women and 46 (24 percent) men. The respondents of the second survey were on average 34 years old and had lived in their respective countries for 7 years (median 5 years). There were a number of respondents who had onward migrated during the period of the study: a total of 48 (25 percent) respondents had changed countries since the first survey: 30 had returned to Finland, 9 moved to another EU country, and 9 to a non-EU country. A majority of the respondents had so far followed a rather traditional mobility pattern: their move to the current country was the only movement that could be observed from the countries of residence they listed in the two surveys. There were, however, also respondents who had either moved twice (33 percent) or even three times (8 percent). The combinations of possible mobility trajectories are detailed below and further discussed later in the article:

Table 1: *Migration trajectories of WiE respondents who took part in both of the 2008 and 2010 surveys*

TABLE 1 (N=194)	Previous country of residence (CoR)		2008 lived in	2010 lived in
Had moved once = 115 (59%)		FINLAND →	CoR 2008	CoR 2008
Had moved at least twice = 64 (33%)		FINLAND →	CoR 2008 →	CoR 2010
		FINLAND →	CoR 2008 →	FINLAND
	FINLAND →	COUNTRY X →	CoR 2008	CoR 2008
Had moved at least three times = 15 (8%)	FINLAND →	COUNTRY X →	CoR 2008 →	CoR 2010
	FINLAND →	COUNTRY X →	CoR 2008 →	FINLAND

The open-ended responses of the survey respondents and the interview discussions reveal the negotiated nature of mobility: the decision to stay, return or move onwards is often based on a careful calculation of what would be the best option for one's career, family and lifestyle. It is good to note that the migration decision is affected by a multitude of interrelated factors and causes that are based on the individual situation of each person contemplating migration. Especially those with foreign spouses talk about the complexity of choosing the best place to live when the couple has transnational ties to several countries. Things to consider include at least trying to fulfil family obligations towards elderly parents, choosing the country where children go to school and finding meaningful work for both spouses. In the liquid migration rhetoric of "intentional unpredictability" (Engbersen 2012, 99) the lack of concrete plans is not necessarily a

problem, as a female respondent (b. 1983) from France explains: "I plan to stay in France because of my boyfriend, but we both still want to see the world and will move somewhere for a while. The situation is pretty uncertain now, neither of us knows what will happen next year, or where we will go, but it does not really matter as we both have already lived in several countries before."

The young and highly skilled Europeans of the study do not need to proceed towards their destination of choice via transit countries, as may be the case for migrants restricted by immigration controls or visa problems, but rather are free to move multiple times based on their current life and work situations. This data does not, therefore, reveal any clear patterns of stepwise migration via certain countries towards more desirable destinations, as each respondent follows his or her own logic for moving. Nor does the data provide a definite answer to where the participants of the study will end up staying, or how many transnational moves they will do during their life course, as it only provides a snapshot of the situation at a certain point in time. Yet the data does reveal interesting differences between those who have only moved once versus those who already have moved multiple times and provides an opportunity to discuss, how the accumulating experience of international mobility is useful for those who decide to move again. The following sections of the article further examine the ways in which such individuals with a high amount of international experience or mobility capital (e.g. Murphy-Lejeune 2001) may differ from those, who live abroad for the first time.

Mobility capital in the Working in Europe study

The concept of mobility capital has been used to describe the kinds of skills that exposure to different cultures and languages and experience of international mobility generates for the individual. Not only international migration but also shorter international experiences, such as student exchanges or summer jobs abroad, build mobility capital and have an influence on the career and life choices of the highly skilled individual (Norris & Gillespie 2009; Teichler & Janson 2007). Murphy-Lejeune (2001, 52) notes that mobility capital is constituted of four interlinking elements: "(...) family and personal history, previous experience of mobility including language competence, the first experience of adaptation which serves as an initiation, and finally the personality features of the potential wanderer." Further, Carlson (2013, 172) argues that mobility capital is something that becomes embedded in a person's habitus. For example, a student's interest to partake in exchange studies stems partly from "a specific disposition", which impacts her further courses of action and adds to the desire to seek out new mobility opportunities. Mobility capital can thus be understood as a specific part of cultural capital, the overall set of skills and qualities that one accumulates during international exposure while networking cross-nationally and via traveling or living abroad. In the 2008 WiE survey respondents were asked about their prior international experience that was related to working or studying abroad, taking part in short trips and exchanges, tourism

and the number of countries where they had lived for more than three months. Each survey respondent selected an average of four forms of international experience from a list offering 13 different choices (figure 1). In this article, this information is used to measure the scope of their mobility capital, here understood as the depth of international exposure and transnational experiences in all their different forms.

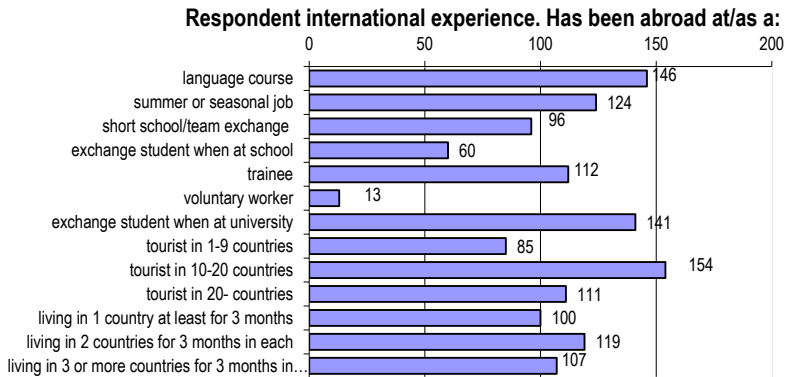


Figure 1: *WiE survey 2008 respondent international experience*

To examine the significance of mobility capital on migration behavior, the respondents are divided into three categories. The category with the least amount of mobility capital is the *one-time migrants* (101), who stated that they had only lived abroad in one foreign country and who selected 1–3 different types of international experience from the list provided (figure 1), thus having lower than average amount of experience. The different possibilities included, for example, student exchange, summer jobs abroad, or having travelled abroad as a tourist. The group with the highest amount of mobility capital, the *serial migrants* (107), had lived abroad in three different countries and selected an average of 4.5 different types of international experience. The remaining 156 respondents were classified as *twice-migrants*: respondents who had lived abroad in 2 countries (119) or who had lived in one country (37), but selected an above average number (4–8) of different types of international experience. As seen in the table below, similar categorizations were made also to the data of the 2010 survey and the 2011 interviews.

Table 2: *WiE study participants according to their mobility capital*

TABLE 2	One-time migrants * lived abroad in 1 country * 1-3 forms of international experience	Twice-migrants / the middle group¹	Serial migrants * lived abroad in 3 countries * 4.5 forms of international experience
2008 SURVEY (n=364)	107	156	101
2010 SURVEY (n=194)	55	89	50
2011 INTERVIEW (n=18)	5	6	7
<i>Amount of mobility capital</i>	<div style="display: flex; align-items: center; justify-content: space-between;"> less more → </div>		

1) This middle group is not under observation in the following parts of the article. They had either lived abroad in 2 countries OR lived abroad in 1, country but have above average level of international experience (4-8)

Here the focus is on the *two categories at the opposite ends of the spectrum*: do the one-time migrants with little international experience and mobility capital differ in some important respect from the serial migrants, who already have experience of living in several different countries? Do the latter display more of the qualities of the liquid migrants (Engbersen 2012) with their open-ended lives and projects? The main characteristics of these two groups are outlined in Table 3. At the outset, the two groups seem rather similar to each other: they are approximately of the same age and thus the one-time migrants' lower amount of mobility capital is not explained, for example, by their younger age. On average, both groups had lived in their current country for five years. 21 per cent of the one-time migrants and 26 per cent of the serial migrants are single. There is no difference between these two groups in terms of having children, as in both groups only a minority (27%) have children. Thus, the importance of family considerations in terms of migration trajectories is not particularly significant here. There is, however, a difference with the interviewees: all one-time migrants are female (5) whereas there are both female (3) and male (4) interviewees who fall into the serial migrant category.

Table 3: *One-time migrants vs. serial migrants*

The one-time migrants			
SURVEY OF 2008			
Male	32	32%	Average age: 32 years (median 32 years)
Female	69	68%	
Total:	101	100%	
Top 5 countries where they lived in 2008: United Kingdom (47), Germany (20), Spain (8), France (8), and Belgium (5 respondents). Average stay in current country: 5 years.			
Highest degree completed 2008: Polytechnic degree: 26 (26%) BA: 19 (19%), MA: 38 (38%), PhD: 6 (6%) Still studying: 12 (12%)			
Family situation in 2008: single 26%, married 31%, co-habiting 43% 27% have children			
FOLLOW-UP SURVEY IN 2010			
Response rate:	50%		
Male	11	22%	
Female	39	78%	
Total:	50	100%	
INTERVIEWS IN 2011 Female: Pauliina, Helena, Maarit, Anneli, Emilia			

The serial migrants			
SURVEY OF 2008			
Male	23	21%	Average age: 33 years (median 32 years)
Female	84	79%	
Total:	107	100%	
Top 5 countries where they lived in 2008: United Kingdom (41), Belgium (21), Germany (11), Spain (10), and France (9 respondents). Average stay in current country: 5 years.			
Highest degree completed in 2008: Polytechnic degree: 17 (16%) BA: 10 (9%), MA: 64 (60%), PhD: 7 (8%) Still studying: 9 (8%)			
Family situation in 2008: single 21 %, married 34%, co-habiting 46 % 27% have children			
FOLLOW-UP SURVEY IN 2010			
Response rate:	51%		
Male	15	27%	
Female	40	73%	
Total:	55	100%	
INTERVIEWS IN 2011 Female: Anna, Minna, Susanna Male: Tapio, Juhani, Mika, Mikael			

A higher share of the one-time migrants (64 percent), than serial migrants (50 percent) had studied only in Finland. Approximately one-fifth of both groups had a degree only from abroad, while the share of those with degrees from both places was considerably higher in the serial migrant group (20 percent) than in the one-time migrant group (3 percent). The serial migrants are more educated than the one-time migrants: nearly 70 percent of them have a master's or even a doctor's degree, while only 44 percent of the one-time migrants are this highly educated. The next section explores the differences between the two groups in terms of *why* they decided to move abroad. Does the fact that many of the serial migrants seem to have taken advantage of almost every possibility to gain international experience make it more likely that they will move again? And in what other ways do the serial migrants differ from those for whom the current time of living abroad is the first experience of its kind?

Leaving Finland

Migration decision-making is not a straightforward process where the motivation to move can be easily reduced to a single determining factor. As Thomas Faist (2000, 38) has stated: “(...) potential migrants often rationalize their actions *ex post* rather than reason *ex ante*”. Because of this, researchers need to be cautious when interpreting migration motivations, since the move can be the result of “not clearly specified feelings of insecurity and dissatisfaction” (Faist 2000, 38) rather than rational analysis of weighing between different options. When the migrant is later asked about her reasons for moving, factors that seem plausible are used to rationalize the move that already happened and the decision that was already taken (see also De Jong and Fawcett 1981, 43–44). Therefore, the responses given to a simple survey question “Why did you move abroad” should not be used to categorize the respondents into substantially different types of migrants, but rather to understand the ways in which they retrospectively have explained their reasons for moving.

In the 2008 survey, the WiE respondents could select a number of possible reasons to *Why did you move abroad?* The reasons were related firstly to work: “to look for work”, “to a job they already got while in Finland”, or “as an employee sent abroad by a Finnish employer.” The second set was related to personal relationships, such as “because my partner was foreign” or “to accompany my partner abroad” and the third category “moved abroad to study” to either for student exchange or to complete a degree abroad. In addition to these concrete reasons for moving, there were also reasons related to lifestyle choices that could be selected, such as “get a better quality of life” and “get away from Finland.” All the possible answer choices are listed in figure 2 according to their popularity.

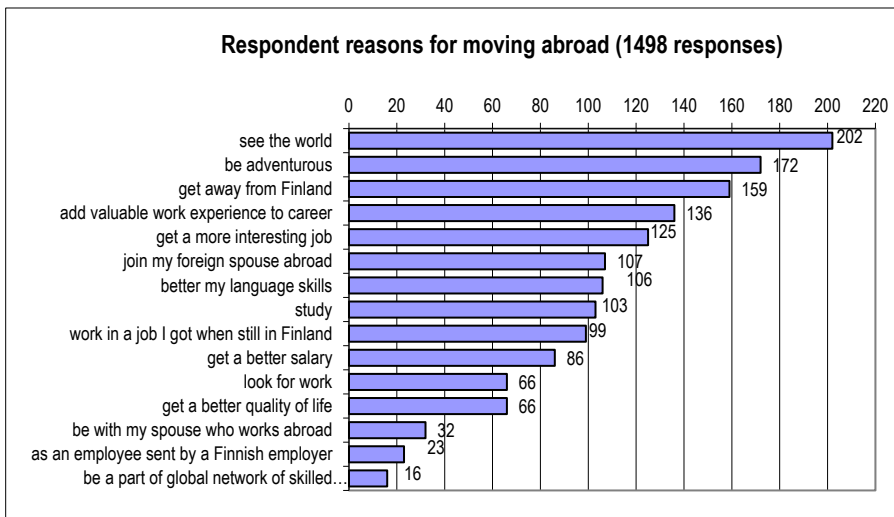


Figure 2: *WiE respondents' reasons for moving abroad*

Each respondent chose an average of four reasons. While the initial push for moving may have come due to the partner's job, for example, the individual may have also chosen to explain that she moved abroad to look for work and to be adventurous. In the words of the respondents: an initial desire to "leave dark and depressing Finland behind", "see the world", or "move somewhere where it is warm" was often put into practice by some more specific factor or event that directed the individual towards a specific country. In the WiE data, the one-time migrants selected more work than family reasons, while with the serial migrants both types of reasons were equally common. It was more common amongst the one-time migrants to have multiple motivations: 16 one-time migrants (out of 101, i.e. 15 percent) selected both work and family-related reasons, while only ten serial-migrants (out of 107, i.e. 10 percent) did the same. Pauliina, a one-time migrant who moved to Denmark to be with her boyfriend explains:

"I moved because of my husband. I graduated in December 2006 and started looking for work [in Finland], but did not find anything at all (...) I was so fed up with the situation so I started looking for work here at random and I got a job. So instead of him moving to Finland, I decided to move here, at first just to try it out, but since I have liked living here so I've been here over three years now." (Pauliina, F, b. 1980, MA in plant biology.)

The stated migration motivations of the one-time migrant group and the serial migrant group, therefore, differ from each other. The one-time migrants were more likely to move abroad to a job they already had acquired before moving: 36 percent had found the job abroad when they were still living in Finland, while in the serial migrant group the share of these respondents was only 14 percent. The former group was also more likely than the latter to stress career reasons for mobility, such as "getting valuable work experience for their career" (41 percent vs. 32 percent) or "get a better salary" (25 percent vs. 21 percent). On the other hand, the serial migrants were more likely to select reasons that were not so directly linked with career advancement, such as "get an interesting job" (37 percent vs. 27 percent) or to "get a better quality of life" (19 percent vs. 14 percent). Moving abroad was perhaps more of a life-turning event for those with less experience, than for those who had already had the experience of leaving and returning before. For some, the desire to leave Finland was the main thing. This was the case with Mikael (m, b. 1976), a serial migrant, who lived in the United Kingdom and Denmark as a child. He was headhunted to work at a bank in Luxembourg, and from there he then moved to live across the border in Germany. He explains:

"I was not aiming particularly towards Luxembourg, but I just wanted to work somewhere outside Finland (...) I have not grown bored with this yet, so I am not planning to move again, but of course, if something more interesting shows up then I'm ready to check it out."

As can be observed from Table 1 listing the migration trajectories of the WiE study participants, the majority of the 2008 survey respondents had moved to their current countries from Finland. Yet a sizeable number had already lived in some other foreign country: 85 (23 percent) out of the original 364 respondents had migrated from some other foreign country. In line with the quite limited previous international experience of the one-time migrant group, 97 percent of them had moved to their current countries directly from Finland. Also in line with the international nature of the serial migrant group, a majority (56 percent) of them had moved to their current countries from some other foreign country. Many young Europeans initially move abroad with the help of the EU-funded Erasmus+ student exchange programme, which has financed the mobility of 9 million students, teachers, trainees and volunteers since its inception in 1987 (European Commission 2017). If this experience of living abroad is positive, it increases the likelihood of moving abroad again sometime in the future (Carlson 2013; Murphy-Lejeune 2003; Van Mol 2011; Wiers-Jenssen 2008). Of the serial migrants, 53 percent had been on exchange during their university years while the share of former exchange students was only 10 percent among the one-time migrants.

The WiE participants had taken advantage of the ease of transnational mobility that the European free movement regime has guaranteed. As voluntary migrants moving within Europe, a return home is always an option for those dissatisfied with their life abroad. So is their stay in their current countries likely to be permanent or will they choose to return to Finland or move somewhere else?

Should I stay or should I go?

Future migration behaviour is difficult to predict, as situations change and sudden job opportunities or major life course events such as finding a partner, divorcing, or experiencing some family tragedy may change one's plans unexpectedly. Migrants often initially perceive the move as temporary and realize only years later that in fact, they have decided to stay. Therefore, the migration intentions of survey respondents, as the WiE study participants in this case, have to be taken with a grain of salt. In the relatively short-term a clear majority of the 2008 WiE survey respondents were planning to stay in their respective countries: 86 percent indicated that they would stay in their current home country for at least one to two years, and 71 percent had plans to stay also for the next three to five years. The following quote summarizes succinctly why this female respondent is staying in France for good: "Life is now here, children, spouse, flat, work experience (b. 1971, France)." The two groups examined in this article differ somewhat in this respect as there are slightly more one-time than serial migrants who say they will likely stay for 1–2 years (89 percent vs. 84 percent). Yet the situation changes when asked for their plans after 3–5 years when the share of those who will likely stay in their current country is higher among the serial than the one-time migrant group (73 percent vs. 62 percent). This reflects an interesting difference among the groups: while

the serial migrants envision leaving their current country for another foreign destination, the main direction of the one-time migrants is towards Finland.

Remigration plans were more common with the serial migrants: when asked about the chances that they would relocate to another EU country because of work, 57 percent of the serial migrant group found this likely, while only 31 percent of the one-time migrant group said the same. Similar difference applies also to moving to work outside of the EU: 45 percent of serial migrants find it likely, but only 32 percent of the one-time migrants. The following quote from a member of the serial migrant group is rather typical: “Both my spouse and I are interested to try living and working either in his home country, another EU-country or outside the EU (f, b. 1976, UK).” Return migration was a more probable option for the first time migrants: a majority of them thought that they may return to Finland due to work (57 percent), family (52 percent), or retirement (51 percent). In the serial migrant group the shares of those considering return were consistently lower for each of the suggested reasons; work (41 percent), family (39 percent), and retirement (43 percent). The reasons why the respondents were thinking of returning were usually related to the desire to be closer to one’s family and elderly parents, to access better social security and a higher standard of living, or to give one’s children a Finnish schooling. Or, simply as this one-time migrant explains: “I will stay in London for a while to gain more work experience, but then I’ll return to Finland mainly because I still feel that it is my home country (m, b. 1983, UK).”

As noted already in the section presenting the WiE data, of the 194 respondents who replied to both the 2008 and the 2010 surveys a total of 30 had returned to Finland and 18 had changed countries in the two-year period. Ten out of the 18 individuals who moved onwards had indicated in 2008 that they had already decided, or were seriously considering, changing countries in the near future. The nine respondents who had moved to non-EU destination countries (e.g. USA, Norway, and Switzerland) originated from the UK (5), Spain (2), Italy (1) and Germany (1). Those moving within the EU were from the UK (to Ireland, Italy, and Belgium), The Netherlands (to Italy and Germany), from Ireland (to Luxembourg), Germany (to the Netherlands and Denmark), and from France (to Italy). Even though the numbers of those who changed countries in-between the surveys are rather small, they point to similar direction as the question on migration intentions, namely that one’s previous international experience – mobility capital – seems to be an important predictor of onward mobility. In fact, ten out of the 18 respondents who moved to another foreign country belong to the serial migrant group while only one of them belongs to the one-time migrant group. In addition, the share of those who had returned to Finland was higher in the one-time migrant group (11) than in the serial migrant group (7).

While it has been noted that Europeans who regularly interact across borders in the EU are more likely to identify themselves as European (Kuhn 2015), there is a difference between the one-time and serial migrant groups. The two groups also differ in terms of identification: while about 94 percent of both groups selected “Finnish” as their primary or secondary identity, there are differences on how they see the country

where they live. The share of those primarily identifying with their current country of residence was higher with the one-time migrants (13 percent) than with the serial migrants (6 percent). Half of those in the serial migration group identified secondarily as Europeans or EU citizens, while only a third of the one-time migrants felt the same. A further third of the one-time migrants identify secondarily as residents of their current country, while only 15 percent of the serial migrants did the same. This difference reflects their attitudes towards the country where they now live: while the one-time migrants may see it as *the destination* abroad, while for at least some of the serial migrants it is only *a destination*; a stop along the way to somewhere else.

Returning or moving onwards?

The ease of transnational mobility within the EU/EEA area makes it possible for young, highly skilled migrants to keep their future plans open. Like this WiE respondent from the serial migrant group explains: “I will stay in my current country because of interesting work assignments. In about 5 years I think I will transfer to another EU country or to Finland for my career. I’ll make the choice based on the kinds of job offers I get (f, b. 1979, Spain).” Rather than investing in local social networks or integration, some prefer to foster transnational connections that facilitate onward migration. For a number of the WiE study participants, serial migration was a calculated strategy. For others, it was the result of a series of coincidences, of taking up on job opportunities that lead to a new foreign destination. The desire for “denationalised freedom” (Favell 2008) was clearly visible in the mobility plans of many respondents who were enjoying the benefits of border-free Europe. Susanna (f, b. 1978, UK) is an example of a migrant on a highly international career path in the serial migrant group, as she has worked in four different countries during her career as a consultant. Her attitude toward possible future mobility is very straightforward:

”Before I moved to Italy, I had already had a boyfriend there for two years, so I flew to Milan each weekend first from London and then from the Netherlands, visited friends in Germany, and was on the move all the time. Europe seemed pretty borderless then. (...) People asked me if it was not tiresome, but when you get used to it, it is not a big deal.”

Company careers that rely on employee’s willingness to be mobile are one factor that fuels onward migration. A number of interviewees in the serial migrant group moved to another foreign destination for a job assignment. Tapio (m, b. 1977, UK) relocated from London to Singapore after the interview in 2011. Juhani (m, b. 1977, Spain) initially moved to Ireland to a job he got through the career’s office of his Finnish university. He still works for the same company that first sent him to the Netherlands for a secondment and then facilitated his transfer to the company’s office in Spain, the home

country of his wife. Also Mika (m, b. 1976, UK) first transferred from London to Hong Kong and later to the United States. Having lived in the United Kingdom as a child, studied for a degree in Sweden, and gone on student exchange in France, transnational mobility was nothing new to him. Despite that the participants of the study felt predominantly Finnish and primarily identified themselves as expatriate Finns (Koikkalainen 2013a), return to Finland does not feature very prominently in their future plans. Initial problems in integrating into the first country of destination, or simply the desire for change, may prompt onward migration rather than return to Finland. As for Minna (f, b. 1976, Ireland), a serial migrant who has lived in France, UK, Sweden, and Ireland. She explains:

“[I live in Ireland] for the time being, it is the same always with me ... that it is not permanently, nor for a little while, but it is for now, so that when the wind blows again, when I begin to feel restless again and think where should I go now ...”

Moving to a new destination may be a viable option to continue on one's chosen career, or look for new experiences, especially if the initial experience of living abroad was positive. This female survey respondent was ready to move wherever the most interesting job was to be found from: “When I get my master's degree I will look for a job that is the best possible match for my education and career goals, be it in whichever country.” (b. 1979, Germany -> Denmark). Settling in on one permanent country of residence may not even be necessary, as this respondent explains: “I am a freelance translator so I can work anywhere. We are planning to share our time and lives between Belgium, France, and Finland. Finland will most likely be the place where we spend less time.” (f, b. 1964, Belgium).

Conclusion

This article examined the intra-European mobility regime from the perspective of highly skilled migrants: young, educated Europeans who experiment with living abroad, move between European capitals and take up on job offers in various countries. These privileged migrants, or *Eurostars* (Favell 2008), may move freely without having to worry about visas, work permits, or integration requirements often tied to the need to apply for the citizenship of the country of destination. The intra-European migration scene includes patterns of mobility that differ from a simple migration trajectory involving one country of origin and one country of destination and the “super-diversity” (Vertovec 2007) of different migrant groups and trajectories highlight the multifaceted nature of contemporary migration. At best onward migration in Europe can be as easy as buying a low-fare airline ticket or hopping on a fast train. In such a context, moving abroad may not always be a permanent decision, but rather a short-term adventure or a temporary phase in one's career.

This article notes some key differences between those who so far have accumulated little mobility capital, the one-time migrants, and the serial migrants, for whom international mobility was nothing new. In the WiE data, the serial migrants were more educated than the one-time migrants. They moved abroad to look for work, rather than to a job they had acquired already while still living in Finland. As for the motivation for moving abroad, the serial migrant was more likely than the one-time migrant to emphasize reasons that were linked to the quality of life or the quality of the job, rather than a higher salary. More than half of the serial migrants were former exchange students, who had seized many different types of possibilities of gaining mobility capital. They were more likely to express identification with Europe or the EU, while the one-time migrants more readily identified with their current country of residence.

In terms of possible future transnational mobility, for the serial migrants onward migration to another foreign destination was more likely while the main direction of the one-time migrants was return to Finland. In many respects, the one-time migrants, therefore, resembled *settlers*, who are either strongly rooted to their current home country or contemplate returning to Finland, while the serial migrants are *sojourners*, who consider the stay in the current country temporary and contemplate moving onwards to a new destination. The analysis of these two groups shows that while the serial migrant group displays the kind of intentional unpredictability of future plans as Engbersen (2012) associates with liquid migrants, the one-time migrant group seems to be following a much more traditional migration trajectory. The higher amount of accumulated mobility capital is a useful asset whenever one needs to start over in a different location, as one is already accustomed to arranging the practicalities of living abroad, such as a study place, job, housing and transport, finding new social networks, and dealing with the necessary bureaucracy of settling in a new place.

The mobility trajectories of the serial migrants reveal a multitude of ways in which life in border-free Europe can be organized. The WiE data does not show any specific patterns of “most desirable” destinations, where the intra-European migrants would stepwise move to, but rather highlights the negotiated nature of mobility. Different types of motivations related to work and personal relationships are in many cases combined together, so that the desire to move to one’s partner’s home country coincides with a good job opportunity, for example. If the experience of living in a particular country turns out to be less than satisfactory, it is only natural to consider moving again. It would appear that return migration is more likely for those, who moved abroad for a specific job or to complete a study programme – the one-time migrants – while moving onwards is an option for the internationally-minded individuals who left Finland for lifestyle reasons or to complete more open-ended life projects. For some of the serial migrants the future is an adventure that is waiting to happen: “I take it one day at a time, I have no long-term plans (f, b. 1972, Spain)”.

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